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## Diasporic trajectories: Charting new critical perspectives

Françoise Král<sup>a</sup>, Sam Coombes<sup>b</sup>, and Corinne Bigot<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of Paris Nanterre, France; <sup>b</sup>University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK; <sup>c</sup>University of Toulouse II, Toulouse, France

In the course of the last few decades, the field of diaspora studies has developed considerably in terms of both literary output and scholarship and has come to span a large array of geographical contexts and locations. Among them are the diasporas from former colonies to their colonial centres, and the double diasporas – such as the South Asians taken to Kenya in the days of the British Empire, who later relocated to Britain or Canada – as well as more invisible and contemporary kinds of diasporas within Europe’s frontiers. The study of these diasporas has considerably broadened the field and made the focus on the socio-economic and political contexts of migration timely, while the massive influx of refugees from the Middle East of recent years has contributed to shifting the focus from the diasporas of hope to these new “diasporas of terror” and “despair” (Appadurai [1996] 2003, n.p.) which have come centre stage with the migrant crisis. One of the consequences is that the seminal debate about whether the term “diaspora” – initially used in relation to the Jewish and the Armenian diasporas – should be extended to refer to other migrant communities (Safran 1991) is more timely than ever. Yet it needs to be reassessed in the current context, as the brutal displacement of communities around the globe today has much in common with the initial context of displacement of the earliest diasporas. In recent years an ever-growing web of diasporan communities has formed and rhizomed across geographical areas, embracing immigrants, migrants and exiles from all parts of the world. Studies of diasporas have increasingly made room for a focus on more specific groups or even individuals within any given diaspora so as to examine how the diasporic experience either exacerbates or contributes to solving the given predicaments of particular subjects. This multiplication of foci has allowed for a more wide-ranging understanding of contexts as well as for an understanding of the specific agendas and issues of given segments of diasporas. It is no longer the case that diasporas can be defined only in relation to their ethnicity or their country of origin; intersectionality and the focus on how multiple parameters and the combining of these parameters radically impact on the experience of diasporas has gathered momentum (Brah 1996, 2018).

Conversely, the delinking (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) which has developed with decolonization has allowed for a nuancing and drawing of attention to the specificity of certain members of given diasporas whose ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation make their own trajectory very different from that of their co-diasporans. In other words, what is a factor of marginalization in one group may not be in another, yet other factors can still marginalize a person. These efforts to circumscribe specific identities, cases or situations, whether they be ethnic, religious, economic, sexual or linked to physical ability/disability, generate an open-ended spectrum of situations and a general map which has become increasingly hard to read.

In epistemological terms the field itself has become diasporized as it has crossed over into contiguous domains – first into the more traditional disciplines of the humanities such as history, the social sciences and so on, and more recently into emerging fields such as gender studies, queer studies, ecocriticism, disability studies and the digital humanities, to name only a few. These recent interactions with contiguous areas testify to the capacity of the field to step outside its comfort zone, as this criss-crossing necessarily involves a rethinking of the methodology and critical tools of an already complex field. Today the migrant crisis at the back of all our minds brings us face to face with the darker side of global population flows, which are not the diasporas seeking opportunities abroad – the diasporas “of hope”, as Appadurai ([1996] 2003, n.p.) calls them – which enjoy the unlimited freedom and mobility of movement, but rather the deprived and the dispossessed who, instead of enjoying the fluidity of our “liquid modern world” (Bauman 2003, n.p.) in a global village of global exchanges, experience the ruggedness of a global geography of hard borders instead of malleable lines (Cohen 2006). They are at Europe’s outer frontiers, and their presence invites us to reposition our perspective not only in relation to the anglophone world, or in relation to the francophone neocolonial trajectories of migration, but in a larger and more global perspective. The sheer impact of numbers is amplified by the prospect of massive migrations in years to come: migrations generated by armed conflicts; migrations linked to the long-term effects of global warming and the fact that certain parts of the world will see their populations relocate to more hospitable climates. And of course the map of global capital in the neo-liberal era, which concentrates massive amounts of capital in the metropolises, will continue to exert a push-pull effect. As foreign capital continues to be

drawn towards the financial capitals, the middle and working classes will find themselves pushed further and further away from the city centres (Castells [1996] 2010) to the point of being deprived of their “right to the city” (Harvey 2008).<sup>1</sup> This process has in a sense only just got fully underway but is likely to accelerate to the extent that the field of diaspora studies is no longer a niche in the humanities, a marginalized locus for academics who devote their time and energy to the study of margins. Arguably, in years to come it will find itself at the centre of debates about global population movements in a number of academic fields. This radical change in the scope and orientation of the field makes the personal tragedies of the diasporas of hope, concerning lives that were chronicled in the literature of the 1980s and 1990s, almost secondary compared to the plight of refugees whose voices are starting to be heard even from the secluded enclaves of offshore camps, as we have seen recently with the example of Behrooz Boochani, an Iranian refugee who in February of this year was awarded the Victorian Premier’s Prize for both fiction and non-fiction, for a book written on his cell phone from the detention camp on Manus Island offshore from Australia. These recent developments have led to a shift in theoretical focus and to some extent a repoliticization of the field, which constitutes a timely response to accusations that the field had somehow got lost in identity politics and that its preoccupation with interna-

tional, transnational diasporas embraced the agenda of neo-liberalism. It is this massive shift in both the field of diaspora studies and the wider world that we seek to embrace with the Diaspolinks Project (<https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/diaspolinks>). Conceived as a transdisciplinary project across the humanities, combining a focus on several regions and reflecting on the epistemological and institutional underpinnings of the academic disciplines linked to the study of diasporas, Diaspolinks endeavours to go against the grain of the move away from theory of the last few decades in the direction of minute recontextualizations. It seeks to trace patterns across geographical and sociopolitical contexts in order to evidence and bring to visibility genealogies that have been segmented by national histories, and the compartmentalization this has led to.

While the first phase of the project – the “Diasporic Trajectories” seminar series which took place at the University of Edinburgh’s Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (IASH) in 2015 and 2016 – sought to take stock of the immediate context of the migrant crisis, the second phase and the putting together of this special issue of

the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* takes place against another political backdrop, that of the Brexit limbo stage; that is, the period between the Brexit vote and the actual exit of Britain from the European Union (EU). This situation is not limited to the UK, as throughout Europe national election results have expressed a resurgence of nationalism and we have seen nationalist parties coming to power whose agendas involve the closing of frontiers, the tightening of borders, and the regulating of immigration if not a cessation of it. This turning point in contemporary history invites us to reconsider what our field had taken for granted, namely the transnational ethos of a global village which no longer seems global, let alone a village; and also to reflect on cosmopolitan aspirations which for some are to be considered as a threat – being a citizen of the world meaning becoming a “citizen of nowhere”<sup>2</sup> – rather than a sane aspiration. It is in these inhospitable times that we are forced to measure the promises of McLuhan’s ([1964] 1987) global village up against the fractal mobility of those who have access to capital versus those who do not. Europe finds itself drawn into this knot of issues, not only as the place from which we speak, but as a seminal site of migration whose diasporic inheritance has been too readily erased by the advent of nation states and their discourses which retrospectively normalized and neutralized foreign inheritances and their past genealogies. France is a particularly interesting case in point as historians Bancel, Blanchard, and Vergès (2003) have noted, as it is a nation of immigrants that refuses to face up to the reality of many of its citizens’ foreign origins; and, we could add, that normalizes them into a narrative of the nation. Normalizing or naturalizing – as the French term *naturalisation* suggests – refers to the process whereby some “others” are absorbed into the master narrative of the nation and are no longer considered as foreign. Between the two world wars, France welcomed great numbers of immigrants from Italy, Poland and Czechoslovakia, who helped rebuild the country after the havoc left by the Great War. While they had entered the country with temporary work permits, these people subsequently applied for French nationality for their children and for themselves. In the process they were granted a *naturalisation* and their identity cards bore slightly altered names, translated, streamlined (their diacritical accents removed or replaced by signs which existed in the French language). In other words, these foreigners were made to sound less foreign. These immigrants, who lived long before the days of identity politics, thought it wiser to sever all links with the mother country, often preventing their

children from learning the mother tongue, and encouraging them to blend in. Their stories, which were made invisible, cast a different light on what it means to belong or to be an outsider, and on the legitimacy of borders and nation states. Today's Europe, with its history, its complex geography of borders, unmade and remade, negotiated, lost or won, endlessly redrawn, is inviting us to reflect on who we are. Its history has consciously erased the diasporic subtext so as to produce a monolithic narrative of the nation. It is a narrative which has chronically focused on difference, on racial difference, on so-called otherness, to create the illusion of a common matrix. Even in countries where multiculturalism is the norm, multiculturalism always refers implicitly to multicultural "with others".

Our intention in this Special Issue is to bring the various pictures together, that of the francophone world with the anglophone one, that of colonial nations whose diasporas have embraced new trajectories and whose connection to the English language has opened up new pathways. Thinking of them globally provides a necessary counterweight in order to safeguard both the close-up and the broader understanding of the dynamics at play. It also brings them face to face with each other as the representation of the situation on each side of the channel is very different.

The Special Issue also seeks to take into account the epistemological context in which the field is developing, both in terms of disciplinary agendas and histories, and in terms of the contrasted histories of the field in France and in anglophone countries. In terms of academic and cognitive contexts, France and Britain have markedly different traditions. While postcolonial studies are often confined to either literary studies or cultural studies in France, the two following essentially separate agendas and rarely coming together, in Britain the tradition is more prone to cross-disciplinary interactions following a tradition of renegotiating disciplinary boundaries in the humanities. The Mass Observation Project, for example, which studied Britain from 1945 onwards, was coordinated by a poet, Charles Madge; an anthropologist, Tom Harrisson; and a filmmaker, Humphrey Jennings, and is proof of the long-standing tradition of cross-disciplinary investigations that were possible in Britain at a time when French academics were limited by a constricting straightjacket of disciplinary boundaries.

In terms of philosophical stance and agenda the two cognitive traditions are based on significantly different principles. The French tradition remains very attached to the notion of *laïcité* (secularism), yet to

a form of secularism which differs from that of Britain or other nations as it has its origins in the split between the Church and the State which resulted from the French Revolution. With its firm refusal of any signs denoting religious belonging or identity in the public sphere, *laïcité* today is faithful to the radical revolutionary spirit from which it was spawned; yet this radical *laïcité* is increasingly difficult to reconcile with a growing multicultural population which sometimes resents the fact that the public space in France is not in reality totally *laïc*. The considerable number of bank holidays for religious Catholic celebrations continues to show the unspoken attachment of France to its historical Judeo-Christian roots. In recent years, tension has been mounting as the public space has become an object of contestation. Moreover, the lack of representation of certain minorities and their absence from the circles of power is undeniable. If France has gone some way towards coming to terms with its colonial past, the indictment of a collusion between the west and universalist and universalizing agendas made by postcolonial studies in the anglophone world still has a long way to go in that country. Recently, the monthly *Revue des Deux Mondes* brought out a special issue entitled “Terrorisme intellectuel. Après Sartre, Foucault, Bourdieu ... l'idéologie indigéniste entre à l'université” (Intellectual terrorism. After Sartre, Foucault, Bourdieu... indigenist ideology enters the university) (“Terrorisme intellectuel” 2019), arguing that postcolonial studies is a form of intellectual terrorism and accusing the still quite limited number of French scholars specialized in postcolonial studies of buying into a form of “indigenism”. The journal takes up the argumentation, editorial line and rhetorics of a manifesto text published in the weekly magazine *Le Point* entitled “Le ‘décolonialisme’, une stratégie hégémonique: l'appel de 80 intellectuels” (“Decolonialism”, a hegemonic strategy: an appeal from 80 intellectuals) (“Decolonialism” 2018). The anglo- phone reader will probably be surprised to read that a group of intellectuals in France have gone so far as to speak out publicly against and effectively petition academic scholars and teachers who have shown a sustained interest in minority rights. In this “appeal”, the signatories object to what they present as an invasion within the university context of discourses denouncing racism, sexism and Islamophobia. Such discourses, so they believe, run counter to the French secularist orthodoxy and concomitant commitment to universalist egalitarianism, and hence should be repelled. What the signatories to the appeal fail to take account of is the fact that groups like the “Parti des indigènes de la République”, the “Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France”, the “Marche

des femmes pour la dignité”, “Camp décolonial” and the “Conseil représentatif des associations noires” were themselves set up as a corrective to the age-old tendency of the establishment in France to overlook the specificities of the social, political and cultural condition of minority groups of all sorts; that it is not the intention of pressure groups like those listed above, nor would it be a realistic aim, to try to overturn or overthrow norms of secularism and universalist republicanism, but rather to insist on more equitable treatment for those French citizens whom these pillars of French intellectual and political culture in real terms have long tended to disparage.

The situation in France needs to be explained against another backdrop, that of the conflict in Palestine and the policy of Israel as the Muslim population in France reacts to situations in France with a broader picture in mind, that of the treatment of Muslims worldwide. It is these types of discussions and cross-contextualizations that the seminar series has allowed for and it has been tremendously valuable to compare, confront and bring together the academic and more broadly the national contexts in which the theories and ideas discussed have their origins. The seminar series quickly became a forum for discussions as to the underpinnings of theories which circulate across the francophone and anglophone spheres, their contrasting receptions and the different developments which resulted, given the specific agendas of the contexts and academic systems into which they were introduced.

If we put to one side for a moment the political and philosophical contexts, comparing the French and anglophone worlds ultimately invites us to reflect on the production of a body of scholarship – postcolonial studies and its offshoot or sibling, diaspora studies – which not only gives theoretical expression to its objects of study, but also refracts a larger context and is received in contrasting ways. Postcolonial studies at its inception is often associated with francophone thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire and Albert Memmi. It is true that their influence has crossed over to the anglophone context, and yet the way the postcolonial question has been framed and continues to be framed today is markedly different in anglophone societies. While Fanon has become a pillar of post-colonial studies in the anglophone world, he is still a marginal figure in France. As for the “négritude” writers and intellectuals, whatever the undeniably positive impact of their interventions in their local contexts may have been, they have not really shaken the foundations of French universalism. But more importantly,



writers and thinkers circulating across linguistic borders and cultures are read and interpreted differently; the American Deleuze is not quite the French Deleuze, and “French theory” as it is known has been produced and read in the US context in ways that often bear little connection to how the philosophers in question were received and read in their home country (Cusset 2003).

Last but not least, the combined approach to the anglophone and francophone contexts and the dyptich which it refracts, ultimately tells of two colonial histories that have also evolved differently in the postcolonial period and have morphed again in the neocolonial era. The neocolonial period is characterized by a bifurcation which is evidenced by the contemporary history of the two colonial languages, French and English. While English has become the lingua franca – that is, the main language in terms of economic dealings and exchanges throughout the world, partly due to the transition from British colonialism to American imperialism – French ultimately forfeited its position as the language of diplomacy which it had gained with the Treaty of Rastatt and maintained until the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, marking the end of the First World War. Ironically, this former colonial language and global language of diplomacy has been subalternized in relation to English. In this context a stimulating line of reflection has emerged, coming from philosophers who have questioned the problematic relationship between language and forms of political domination; this angle of approach is all the more interesting as the issue of language, which was centre stage in the first decades of postcolonial studies, seems to have fallen out of currency. And yet, in an era perhaps too readily assumed to be entirely coextensive with globalization, because we as cultural analysts are aware of the resilience of local cultures beneath the veneer of homogenized practices, the question of language is more than ever a privileged entry point into the idiosyncrasy of cultures. The work of French philosopher Barbara Cassin (2016) has been central to recent reflection on one of the key issues in diaspora studies, namely that of language in relation to universalism. Cassin’s work originates in her research into Greek philosophy where the notion of *logos* is problematic if one takes into account the history of Greek imperialism and hegemony. Cassin’s awareness of the way universalism has its roots in a situation of political and cultural hegemony and her misgivings about the instrumentalization of language in situations of hegemony does not

lead her to reject universalism as a whole but to “compliquer l’universel” (complexify universalism) as she explains in her 2016 book *Eloge de la Traduction, Compliquer l’universel*. Language, and the fact that key concepts cannot be reduced to a translation into another language rooted in a different history – the concepts need to be translated over and over again to try and approach a meaning that ultimately is not self-evident – implies a dynamic epistemological gesture which gives language pride of place. Cassin has led the impressive project of the *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des Intraduisibles* (2004) whose ambition is to chart an in-depth cartography of the philosophical notions which underpin western philosophy and evidence the way in which the notions overlap, though never completely. When circulating and coming to existence in a given context they are reframed and take on another shade of meaning. What Cassin argues is that it is not that we cannot agree on a common definition and that concepts are untranslatable as such; it is rather that they are untranslatable outside of a philosophical gesture which requires that we constantly *retranslate* them.

In this increasingly fractal world picture (Král 2014), it has become necessary to redefine the scope and agenda of the term “diaspora”, and of the ideal of freedom of movement that underpins it and which was much fêted in the 1990s celebration of the figure of the nomad and the migrant. In the light of today’s fractal and polarized geography where diasporization has come to encompass the forced exile generated by the loss of actual rights to the city, diasporization, and the centrifugal force it encompasses, needs to be brought into tension with the harsh reality.

With the phrase “diasporic trajectories”, we sought to shift the focus from a sequenced and segmented approach to the reintroduction of a diachronic perspective, not only over one generation but more broadly over several generations, including the longer histories of given diasporas over the centuries. Trajectories have directionality; the agendas of the diasporic communities themselves in the making, either clear or diffuse, and those of the nations in which they are situated. Given trajectories, moreover, are always impacted by and continue to impact on others. Lastly, trajectories also yield a blueprint producing an image upon which to construct one’s own critical apparatus. It is this complex geography that we seek to apprehend.

This Special Issue opens with two articles seeking to reassess the

achievements of the field of diaspora studies in terms of critical undertakings whilst stressing its critical and theoretical shortcomings. The article by Claire Joubert entitled “Poetics and the Geopolitics of Knowledge: From Colonial to Global” maps the field of anglophone postcolonial studies. Joubert pays particular attention to the institutional context in which these fields have emerged and developed and in particular within a context of neo-liberal economics which has had a direct impact on the way academic institutions function.

The second article, by philosopher Rada Iveković, offers a thorough and forceful critique of the complicities of western episteme and the consequences which it continues to have, not only insofar as diasporas are concerned, but more broadly in other areas, from feminist studies to environmental issues where the same patterns of a gender- arrogant patriarchal system operate along similar lines, have an equally detrimental effect and are responsible for similar evils. Iveković vigorously argues that it seems necessary to develop some new and radical ideas about our sustainable world. The agenda of these alternative scenarios or “dispositifs” is about overcoming the current epistemological hegemony, while keeping in mind the global south(s), feminism and the anthropocen- trizing of knowledge and its transmission. It is a basic and key move.

The second section focuses on cross-fertilizations between diaspora studies and adjacent fields as well as on rethinking certain concepts, such as *créolité*, for example, in relation to diaspora studies. In his article “Glissant and Diaspora Studies”, Sam Coombes focuses on the work of Edouard Glissant. Although an increasingly influential figure in the field of postcolonial studies, Glissant is not commonly associated with discussions of diaspora-related issues, and modern-day Caribbean citizens may not be diasporans in the strict sense of the term. Coombes, however, seeks to identify areas of overlap between Glissantian thought and the diaspora studies field. He argues in parti- cular that the legacy of the forced diasporization of Africans via the slave trade is such that the diasporic as a prism lies at the heart of the social history of the Caribbean, and

that this focus underpinned the work of Glissant throughout his career. Coombes also charts areas of reciprocity between later Glissantian concepts and a number of key concepts which have been elaborated by diaspora studies theorists since the 1990s.

Abigail Ward's article, "'Dead men tell no tales, but dead white men document plenty': Imagining the Middle Passage in Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* and Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts*", evidences how contemporary writers have drawn upon the ellipses of official history to revisit the period of the slave trade and reassess the responsibility of slave-trading nations. Looking at the work of Fred D'Aguiar and Caryl Phillips, Ward charts the newly emerging trajectories that were engulfed before finally coming to visibility and audibility in the pages of official history and in literature. She evidences the echoes and dialogues across the Atlantic between British and US poets and novelists. Corinne Bigot's article "Diasporic Culinary Trajectories: Mapping Food Zones and Food Routes in First-Generation South Asian and Caribbean Culinary Memoirs" is part of a larger project about culinary memoirs, a genre that has emerged in recent years and that still awaits a methodological breakthrough. Bigot proposes to develop an ethnopoetics of culinary memoirs allowing for a larger cartography of exchanges and mobility through the circulation of food. Through a focus on two culinary memoirs, one by Caribbean-born Canadian writer Austin Clarke and his *Pig Tails "n" Breadfruit* and another by South Asian food-writer Madhur Jaffrey's *Climbing the Mango Trees*, Bigot shows how the culinary has become a way to address contemporary issues of origin and identity, to tell stories of family and legacies.

In her article "From Sojourners to Citizens: The Poetics of Space and Ontology in Diasporic Chinese Literature from Aotearoa/New Zealand", Michelle Keown analyses the work of two contemporary Chinese New Zealand poets, Renee Liang and Alison Wong, who explore the historical and contemporary experiences of the Chinese diasporic community in New Zealand. Written in the aftermath of the New Zealand government's 2002 apology for the discriminatory poll tax levied on Chinese gold miners in the 19th century, Wong's poetry meditates upon the attenuated lives of Cantonese immigrants subjected to racial abuse and geographical segregation by the dominant European New Zealand community. Liang, on the other hand, explores changing attitudes towards New Zealand's long-established Chinese diasporic community

in the wake of the 1987 Immigration Control Act, which allowed thousands of new Asian immigrants to enter and work in New Zealand.

The final article of this section, Kathie Birat's "Making Sense of Memory in the

Writings of the Caribbean Diaspora: Sam Selvon's London Calypso", looks back at Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, placing the novel in the Caribbean tradition of calypso. Birat argues that calypso informs the novel on both a formal and a generic basis. Drawing on studies of orality in fiction as well as on studies of sound, Birat evidences the ways in which the performance of the narrative voice calypso becomes a blueprint for the charting of the Caribbean collective memory.

The third section of this Special Issue focuses more specifically on language and languaging as a prism through which to observe the rugged outlines of today's cultural globality. "Polyglossing in English: The Diasporic Trajectories of the English language" proposes to reassess the dynamic history of English in the 20th century through to the turn of the 21st century through the prism of the communities in transit. Françoise Král's interest in combining the perspective of the language with diaspora studies is to analyse how, through these diasporic trajectories, diasporas are not only shaped by a language of former colonial origin, but how they in turn shape it, inflecting its grammar to their needs, bending its rules when necessary and most of all speaking their home language through English in a sort of creative polyphony. Král positions herself at the crossroads of globality studies so as to look at the diasporic perspective, removed, in transit, as a dual, plural and dynamic perspective on globality which allows us to gauge the degree of cultural homo-geneity, or on the contrary the resilience of cultural diversity and local moorings which continue to exist and are expressed by and in spite of a language which has become global. In his article "Postcolonial Untranslatability: Reading Achille Mbembe with Barbara Cassin", Michael Syrotinski draws on Barbara Cassin's (2004) monumental *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, first published in French, an encyclopaedic dictionary of nearly 400 philosophical, literary, aesthetic and political terms which have had a long-lasting impact on thinking across the humanities. The question of the "Untranslatable" (those words or terms which locate problems of translatability at the heart of contemporary critical theory) has opened up new paradigms for both translation studies and philosophy. Syrotinski argues that there is a far-reaching resonance between Barbara Cassin's *Dictionary of Untranslatables* project (Cassin et al. 2014) and Achille Mbembe's theorization of the postcolonial, precisely insofar as they meet at the

crossroads of (un)translat- ability. Syrotinski reads both texts performatively, in terms of their respective writing practices and theoretical “entanglements”, which is itself one of Mbembe’s key terms.

## Notes

1. The notion of right to the city, inspired by the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991, 2003), was developed by David Harvey (2008) in a seminal article in the *New Left Review*: “We live in an era when ideals of human rights have moved centre stage both politically and ethically. A great deal of energy is expended in promoting their significance for the construction of a better world. But for the most part the concepts circulating do not fundamentally challenge hegemonic liberal and neoliberal market logics, or the dominant modes of legality and state action. We live, after all, in a world in which the rights of private property and the profit rate trump all other notions of rights. I here want to explore another type of human right, that of the right to the city” (23).
2. At the United Kingdom Conservative Party conference in October 2016, Theresa May made the following statement: “If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere. You don’t understand what the word ‘citizenship’ means.” In the context of ongoing debates about Brexit, this statement sparked some degree of controversy

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